

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SANTIAGO 11822

LIMDIS

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TAGS: PFOR, CI
SUBJECT: CHILE: DIALOGUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS MATTERS

REF: SANTIAGO A-156, OCTOBER 26, 1976

1. SUMMARY: IN SECOND PRIVATE MEETING WITH TWO INFLUENTIAL CHILEAN ARMY GENERALS, AMBASSADOR PURSUED QUESTION THEY HAD RAISED AS TO WHAT GOC MIGHT DO TO IMPROVE ITS POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE U.S. NOTING FAVORABLE REACTION EVOKED BY MASS RELEASE OF CHILEAN POLITICAL PRISONERS, AMBASSADOR CONVEYED HIS BELIEF THAT HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS WOULD BE AT LEAST AS IMPORTANT TO THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AS TO THIS ONE; EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT STEPS CHILEANS MIGHT TAKE TO IMPROVE THEIR SITUATION WOULD BE FAIRLY CONSIDERED IN THE ONGOING USG EVALUATION OF CHILE; WARNED THAT BACKSLIDING FROM PROGRESS ALREADY MADE WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE AND LARGE-SCALE DISAPPEARANCES OR NEW REPORTS OF TORTURE PARTICULARLY HARMFUL; AND SUGGESTED THAT NOW WAS THE TIME FOR FURTHER MOVEMENT TOWARD NORMALIZATION. AMBASSADOR ALSO SUGGESTED RESTRICTIONS ON DINA. GENERALS MADE NO COMMITMENTS, BUT WE HAVE IMPRESSION OUR THOUGHTS WILL BE CAREFULLY CONSIDERED AT TOP GOC LEVEL.
END SUMMARY.

2. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT IN LATE OCTOBER AMBASSADOR AND ARMY ATTACHE COLONEL CUMMINGS MET WITH INTERIOR MINISTER GENERAL CESAR BENAVIDES ESCOBAR AND SECRETARY-GENERAL OF GOVERNMENT BRIG. GENERAL HERNAN BEJARES GONZALEZ TO EXCHANGE
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IMPRESSIONS, PRIVATELY AND INFORMALLY, REGARDING WHAT MIGHT

BE DONE BY GOC TO MODERATE INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM OF CHILE ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS (REF SANTIAGO A-156). ON THAT OCCASION AMBASSADOR CITED THE SECRETARY'S SUGGESTIONS AT THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING IN SANTIAGO AS AN APPROPRIATE GUIDELINE. ALTHOUGH THE GENERALS MADE NO COMMITMENTS, THEY LISTED CAREFULLY TO OUR ELABORATION OF THESE SUGGESTIONS.

3. ABOUT THREE WEEKS LATER GOC ANNOUNCED RELEASE OF OVER 300 POLITICAL PRISONERS BEING HELD WITHOUT TRIAL, THUS VIRTUALLY CLEARING ITS DETENTION CENTERS OF PRISONERS IN THIS CATEGORY. WHILE WE HAVE NO BASIS FOR CONNECTING THE RELEASE WITH THE DINNER CONVERSATION, IT WAS CLEARLY A STEP DESIGNED IN LARGE PART TO ASSUAGE FOREIGN OPINION. SUBSEQUENTLY, TOP GOC MILITARY HAVE CONTINUED TO EXPRESS INTEREST IN WHAT THEY MIGHT DO TO IMPROVE CHILE'S POSITION OVERSEAS, PARTICULARLY IN THE UNITED STATES. THEY HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY CONCERNED OVER WHAT POLICY LINE THE NEW ADMINISTRATION MIGHT ADOPT. ACCORDINGLY, THEY WELCOMED A SUGGESTION TO MEET WITH US AGAIN, AFTER THE AMBASSADOR'S RETURN FROM WASHINGTON. WE LUNCHEDED ON DECEMBER 13.

4. AMBASSADOR MADE SEVERAL POINTS TO START THE DISCUSSION. FIRST, HE SAID THAT PRISONER RELEASE HAD EVOKED A FAVORABLE RESPONSE IN U.S., BOTH OFFICIALLY AND AMONG THE PUBLIC. U.S. GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN IN UNGA AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS HAD MADE FAVORABLE REFERENCES TO IT. PRESS HAD GIVEN IT VERY GOOD PLAY. SUBSEQUENT RELEASE OF PRISONERS BY INDONESIA AND IRAN MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN ENTIRELY UNCONNECTED WITH THE CHILEAN ACTION.

5. SECOND, AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS WERE OBVIOUSLY GOING TO BE AS IMPORTANT FOR NEW ADMINISTRATION AS THEY HAD BEEN FOR THE PRESENT ONE. HE RECALLED STATEMENTS BY SECRETARY-DESIGNATE VANCE AT RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE, AND VANCE NEWSWEEK INTERVIEW, TO INDICATE THAT THIS WOULD REMAIN A MATTER OF CONCERN BUT POINTED OUT THAT THE PRAGMATIC AND EVEN-HANDED APPROACH SECRETARY-DESIGNATE HAD ADVOCATED WOULD GIVE CHILEANS A FAIR OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT THEIR CASE IN AN EFFECTIVE WAY. MUCH WOULD DEPEND ON THE CURRENT EVOLUTION OF GOC INTERNAL SECURITY POLICY.

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6. THIRD, AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED THAT ACCORDINGLY, CHILEANS MIGHT WISH TO CONSIDER DESIRABILITY OF LAUNCHING NEW HUMAN RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, SO THAT THE INTENT AND DIRECTION OF THE GOC COURSE OF ACTION WOULD BE PLAIN BY THE TIME THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AND THE CONGRESS BEGAN TO REVIEW MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS.

7. FINALLY, AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS MOST IMPORTANT THAT GAINS ALREADY ATTAINED THROUGH PRISONER RELEASE SHOULD BE MAINTAINED. IF THERE WERE CREDIBLE REPORTS THAT SCREWS HAD AGAIN BEEN TIGHTENED AND THAT GOC WAS MOVING BACK INTO PERIOD OF EXTREME REPRESSION, ALL THE GOOD EFFECTS OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS WOULD BE REVERSED AND OPPOSITION TO PRESENT REGIME FURTHER SOLIDIFIED.

8. BENAVIDES AND BEJARES INDICATED THAT THEY UNDERSTOOD SITUATION IN GENERAL TERMS LAID OUT BY AMBASSADOR. THEY EVINced CONFIDENCE THAT CURRENT RELAXATION COULD CONTINUE. AS AT OUR PREVIOUS MEETING, THEY DID NOT PARTICULARIZE, BUT THEY TALKED IN TERMS OF CONTINUING EVOLUTION AND FURTHER STEPS.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SANTIAGO 11822

9. WE SPENT SOME TIME DISCUSSING THE QUESTION OF THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES OF PERSONS WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN PICKED UP BY GOVERNMENT AGENTS FOR ALLEGED OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES. AS USUAL, THE GENERALS DEPREcATED THIS POSSIBILITY, NOTING THAT IN A COUNTRY LIKE CHILE A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PEOPLE WOULD VANISH EACH YEAR IN ANY CASE; THAT IT WAS A FAVORITE TACTIC OF LEFTISTS TO DROP OUT OF SIGHT AND OBVIOUSLY IN THEIR INTEREST TO HAVE THEIR RELATIVES CHARGE THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD ARRESTED THEM; AND, BY WAY OF ILLUSTRATION, MADE THE CLAIM THAT 150 CHILEANS HAD BEEN FOUND TO BE FIGHTING IN ANGOLA, WITH 15 CHILEAN DEAD. THE GENERALS RESPONDED TO THE AMBASSADOR'S QUESTION AS TO THE SOURCE OF THIS INFORMATION, BY SAYING THEY WOULD TRY TO GET IT. (COMMENT: WE WOULD BE INTERESTED TO KNOW IF THERE IS CONFIRMATION FROM ANY OTHER SOURCE.) IN ANY CASE, GENERAL BENAVIDES PUT THE NUMBER OF DISAPPEARANCES SINCE SEPTEMBER 1973 AT ABOUT 400, A FIGURE MORE THAN 50 PC LOWER THAN ESTIMATES OF THE ICRC AND OTHERS

INTERESTED IN POLITICAL DISSIDENTS.

10. CONVERSATION THEN TURNED TO OTHER MEASURES GOC MIGHT POSSIBLY TAKE. WE SUGGESTED THAT ANY MEANINGFUL RELAXATION OF THE STATE OF SIEGE WOULD BE HELPFUL, AND THAT IF A NEW INTERNAL SECURITY CODE WERE PROMULGATED BY GOC IT MIGHT MAKE THIS POSSIBLE. IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT, HOWEVER, THAT THE CODE NOT CONTAIN WITHIN IT DRACONIAN SANCTIONS SUCH AS SUMMARY EXPULSIONS FROM THE COUNTRY, WHICH ALTHOUGH NOT UNUSUAL IN CHILEAN HISTORY, WERE WIDELY REPUGNANT ELSEWHERE. SUGGESTION WAS ALSO MADE THAT GOC MIGHT WISH TO CONSULT SOME PRIVATE OUTSIDE AUTHORITY ON CONTENT OF SUCH A CODE, TO ENSURE THAT IT WOULD BE IN LINE WITH CURRENT LEGAL THINKING IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES.

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11. AMBASSADOR RAISED A FURTHER POINT IN THIS CONNECTION. HE NOTED THAT THE DIRECTORATE OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE (DINA) HAD ATTAINED AN UNENVIABLE NOTORIETY IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD; IT WAS BEING CITED IN TANDEM WITH SAVAK AND THE KOREAN CIA AS A MODERN VARIETY OF GESTAPO. ANYTHING THAT COULD BE DONE TO LIMIT ITS FUNCTIONS STRICTLY TO INTELLIGENCE, WITHIN THE COUNTRY, WOULD BE HELPFUL. PERHAPS ITS PERSONNEL SHOULD BE CHANGED. BEJARES COMMENTED THAT INDEED DINA SHOULD BE AN INTELLIGENCE RATHER THAN A POLICE ORGANIZATION.

12. AMBASSADOR CONTINUED THAT WITH A LESS RESTRICTIVE SECURITY POLICY IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO BUILD UPON THE CREDIT ALREADY GAINED BY ITS RELEASE OF PRISONERS, ENCOURAGING RECONCILIATION WITH MODERATE, NON-VIOLENT OPPOSITION ELEMENTS AND INCORPORATING THE ENERGIES OF THESE PEOPLE IN THE EFFORT TO REBUILD CHILE. THE GENERALS AGREED IN PRINCIPLE. THEY SAID THAT MANY OF THOSE RELEASED HAD BEEN RESTORED TO THEIR OLD JOBS. RATHER INTERESTINGLY, THEY EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT MANY MARXISTS WHO HAD JOBS IN THE BUREAUCRACY HAD BEEN ABLE TO RESIST ALL COERCIVE MEASURES BECAUSE OF CIVIL SERVICE JOB PROTECTION PROVISIONS. THEY DID NOT BELIEVE JOB DISCRIMINATION ON ACCOUNT OF POLITICAL BELIEF WAS A MAJOR FACTOR IN CHILE. (COMMENT: WE DISAGREE.)

13. BOTH BENAVIDES AND BEJARES EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE FRANK EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND SUGGESTED THE DISCUSSIONS BE RESUMED AT AN OPPORTUNE TIME.

14. COMMENT: WE CITE THE POINTS MADE BY BENAVIDES AND BEJARES NOT AS NECESSARILY INDICATIVE OF THE OBJECTIVE SITUATION IN CHILE, BUT RATHER OF THEIR STATE OF MIND AND APPROACH. WE BELIEVE WE MADE SOME IMPRESSION ON THEM IN INDICATING THAT THE STEPS THEY MIGHT TAKE TO CLEAN UP

THE CHILEAN SITUATION WOULD BE FAIRLY CONSIDERED IN THE
ONGOING U.S. EVALUATION OF CHILE, AND WITH OUR SPECIFICS
AS TO THE SORT OF THING THE GOC MIGHT DO. AS IN THE CASE
OF OUR PREVIOUS MEETING, WE HAVE THE FEELING THAT OUR VIEWS
WILL BE COMMUNICATED TO PINOCHET; THE TWO GENERALS ARE
IN HIS CLOSEST ENTOURAGE. WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THE
GOC ANNOUNCED SOME SIGNIFICANT FURTHER STEPS OF

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